Assessment for Learning as a participative pedagogy.

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Abstract

AfL practices observed in case studies in a North Queensland school were analysed from a sociocultural theoretical perspective. AfL practices of feedback, dialogue and peer assessment were viewed as an opportunity for students to learn the social expectations about being an autonomous learner, or central participant within the classroom community of practice. This process of becoming more expert and belonging within the community of practice involved students negotiating identities of participation that included knowing both academic skills and social expectations within the classroom.

This paper argues that when AfL practices are viewed as ways of enhancing participation, there is potential for learners to negotiate identities as autonomous learners. AfL practices within the daily classroom interactions and pedagogy that enabled students to develop a shared repertoire, joint enterprise and mutual engagement in the classroom communities of practice are described. The challenges for teachers in shifting their gaze to patterns of participation are also briefly discussed.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is an appealingly simple concept, yet surprisingly difficult to realise in practice. AfL has historically been theorised from a constructivist or neo-behaviourist perspective, where teachers can use assessment information to diagnose gaps in student understanding and use the information to decide what to do next to help students acquire the knowledge and skills to progress to the desired learning goals. Through sharing learning goals, criteria, models and peer and self assessment, students can be given the information they need so they can work to improve their learning outcomes. However, it is clear from AfL research in classrooms that AfL practices are challenging for teachers to enact and do not always clearly translate to improved learner autonomy or learning outcomes for students (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, & Beckett, 2005; Gipps, 2002). The majority of teachers in AfL research reported great difficulty in promoting learner autonomy (James & Pedder, 2006) in particular when AfL practices were implemented as closed procedures within a hierarchical teacher – student relationship (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). Researchers have begun to reconceptualise the complexities of AfL in practice using a sociocultural perspective (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Cowie, 2005; Elwood, 2006; Murphy, 2008; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). They have highlighted the need for research within AfL that explores the teacher's responsibility "for metasocial as well as metacognitive reflection and discussion" (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008, p. 6) since "performance resides not just in the student but in the relationship between the teacher and the individual" (Gipps, 2002, p. 76). Within the family of sociocultural theoretical perspectives, learning is viewed as social participation in a community of practice.

A community of practice is defined by Wenger (1998, p. 5) as a way of talking about "the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognised as competence." A social group within a community is

recognised as a community of practice where there are three dimensions that provide coherence; the dimensions of mutual engagement understood as doing things together, a joint enterprise through which the rhythms of the day to day practice are negotiated, and a shared repertoire of discourses, tools, stories and concepts (Wenger, p. 73). The concept of identity becomes significant as it describes learning as a process of becoming more expert through participation in the practices of the community. AfL practices can therefore be examined as culturally situated patterns of participation that allow students to work out what is valued within that school and classroom community of practice so they can participate more fully. Working out what is valued means paying attention to what expectations and roles are communicated through the language of the teacher-student interactions, what learning qualities are privileged, what opportunities are given to participate, and whether the learner judges that he or she has the identity and capacity to participate in a way that will be valued.

This paper reports from a 2008 research study that sought to understand the problem of how AfL practices could promote learner autonomy in three Queensland classrooms. An argument for why AfL can be viewed as pedagogy of participation within a sociocultural view of learning is outlined. The context and methodology of the research study are then described. Findings that contribute to an understanding of how AfL is negotiated within classroom practice are outlined within the concepts of shared repertoire, mutual engagement, joint enterprise and negotiating identity. Implications for classroom practitioners are then discussed.

Assessment for learning as a participative pedagogy

Learning is conceptualised in a community of practice model as the process of negotiating a sense of 'belonging' within a community of practice and 'becoming' more

expert through participation. A sociocultural view of learning shifts the teacher's focus from individuals internalising learning, an acquisition metaphor of learning, to a more participative perspective so the unit of analysis becomes not the individual teacher or student, but the "patterned collective doings" (Sfard, 2008, p. 124). The teacher's role in AfL changes from one where he or she is trying to guess what was in the student's head in order to correct misconceptions to focus on the student's patterns of participation to enable learning. This conception aligns with the second generation definition of AfL (Klenowski, 2009, p. 278), "assessment for learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning". In this research study AfL practices were defined as school based evaluative practices that occurred within the regular flow of teaching and learning with the purpose of informing and improving student learning to enhance learner autonomy. These were pedagogical practices that included planned activities within the curriculum such as quizzes and collaborative strategies that allowed the teacher and students to evaluate learner understanding as well informal and formal feedback and evaluative dialogue between the teacher and peers. This paper argues that AfL is a pedagogical practice as it occurs within the daily interactions in the classroom, and enables the teacher and students to negotiate shared understandings of productive and more expert ways of participating in the learning that is valued in the classroom community of practice.

AfL practices are a form of what Rogoff (1990) calls guided participation where the tacit and routine arrangements of children's activity in participation in culturally valued activities enable children to appropriate increasingly advanced understandings. Cognitive development occurs "as participatory appropriation through guided participation in a system of apprenticeship"(Rogoff, 1995, p. 155). AfL practices can be understood as a form of

guided participation as learners are apprenticed towards autonomy. Learner autonomy is thus understood as an identity describing a central participant, an identity that will be defined and experienced differently in each classroom. The educational contexts within which the teacher and students negotiate their understandings of autonomy and culturally valued learning are therefore very influential.

Queensland classroom assessment context

AfL is a prominent part of policy discourse in many countries (Murphy, 2009; Stobart, 2009). While the various iterations of AfL in each context share the principle of using assessment information to inform learning progress, the purposes of AfL and who is involved in using the information, whether teachers, students or educational authorities, does vary in the different contexts. In this research study in Queensland middle school classrooms, AfL was not part of the dominant educational policy discourse, but was seen as a pedagogical practice teachers may choose to use as part of quality teaching and learning with the purpose of students developing more responsibility for the quality of their learning performances. AfL practices of sharing criteria, giving feedback and teachers using formative classroom assessment were considered a normal part of a teacher's practice within the Queensland school based assessment policy context.

Queensland schools have worked within a system of school based assessment since 1972 (Pitman & Dudley, 1985). Queensland teachers have had responsibility for "constructing and administering assessment instruments for appraising student work" within a system of syllabus and moderation processes that act as boundaries and points of comparability to define the freedoms of school based assessment practices (ROSBA, 1987, p. 1). While Sadler (1998, p. 1) has described Queensland as a "leader in school based assessment", the practice of school based moderation and development of teacher expertise in

classroom assessment has mostly occurred between teachers in the senior secondary years. For secondary teachers their experiences in senior school assessment often influence their practice in the middle school. For Queensland primary school teachers the opportunity to develop their assessment capacity has occurred within their local networks or schools, or through participation in the recently developed Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) framework. The assessment policy context and practice for Queensland teachers has changed since 2008 with the introduction of statewide common assessment tasks (QCATs) for Year 4, 6 & 9 students in English, Mathematics and Science as part of the QCAR framework, and new National tests in Literacy and Numeracy to assess students in Year 3, 5 7 & 9 against national benchmarks. Teachers are left to make sense of the multiple assessment policy changes within their own classroom context, and AfL has not been a significant part of the policy discourse. For the three Queensland teachers who participated in this research work, AfL was not seen as part of their assessment context, but rather as part of their pedagogy. It was regarded as an enhancement of their current classroom practice, and it was the desired outcome of learner autonomy that made an AfL focus attractive.

Methodology

Three teachers from an independent North Queensland school worked together in an AfL participative research study throughout 2008 in partnership with the researcher who was also a curriculum leader within the school. The teachers (referred to below using pseudonyms) each had reputations for creating positive relationships with students, and were interested in developing learner autonomy through AfL and reflectively examining their practice with peers. Rachel Head, a teacher with five years experience, was the core teacher for her Year 7 class, teaching English, Mathematics, Science and Studies of Society. She chose to develop AfL practices of self and peer assessment through structured collaboration. Greg Barra, a teacher with ten years experience, used dialogue and informal feedback in an IT integration and Indigenous

history Studies of Society context within the specialist class he taught to all Year 8 students. Adam Turner, a science curriculum leader with thirty years of teaching experience focussed on using shared language and routines within his Year 9 science class as contexts for increasing learner autonomy. The cases are more fully described elsewhere (Willis, 2009). Data was gathered by the researcher from nine individual and three focus group interviews with the teachers and eight individual and 11 student focus group interviews that occurred at irregular intervals throughout a single school year. The researcher selected critical incidents in AfL areas identified as areas of focus by the teachers, and these incidents were used in critical reflection by students and teachers in focus groups, which then directed further inquiry. Data from researcher field notes, documents and video footage from 56 hours of classroom observations was also analysed using a constant comparative method of inductive coding to identify themes that were then correlated against the research questions examining the teacher-student relationship, autonomy, patterns of participation and boundaries and tensions.

Findings

In each of the three case study classrooms AfL practices acted as invitations to students to assume the identity of an expert through appropriating an expert's understanding of quality products, processes and patterns of participation. Often the expert was seen to be the teacher, although more expert peers were also recognised and valued by students as sources of instruction. AfL provided students with signals about what was valued by the teacher, and if students appropriated these practices, they helped students move towards a more centrally participating role, that of an autonomous student in the class. The following findings drawn from across the three case studies focuses on the social and cultural participation and engagement with the language, tools and relationships within a community of practice that enabled learners to make meaning and develop expertise or fluency. The patterns of participation are described within Wenger's (1998) three dimensions that

constitute a community of practice, those of shared repertoire, mutual engagement and joint enterprise. Findings relating to the negotiation of identity within AfL as students developed expertise as centrally participating learners are then outlined.

Shared Repertoire – the tools, stories and discourses

Shared ownership of the repertoire occurred as all three teachers used routines to organise the learning and make the expected products of the learning clear. The goals or expected outputs of the learning were made visible through using models, making student work visible to one other, sharing the daily plan and expected outcomes for the lesson, and then collaboratively setting and checking visible goals towards these outcomes. AfL processes included using tools and strategies such as strategic questioning, criteria and checklists to evaluate how closely the products matched expectations of performance. Strategic questions enabled teachers and students to explore the reasoning behind ideas, examining connections, applications, and evaluating the student's degree of expertise against criteria.

Through reifications of processes such as checklists, thinking routines, graphic organisers and routines around the use of physical tools such as laboratory equipment, and laptop computers students engaged in significant participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 1995). Through frequent use of the routines, students appropriated habits of experts, often not recognising the source of the learning;*"I don't do it on purpose, but from the scientific method [studied earlier in the year], I know how to write up my other methods, So I kind of do use it, but not on purpose."(Michelle, yr 9 student)*

Strategies that experts use were made visible and accessible to students by the teachers, but also importantly by their peers. The teachers often put students in the role of an

expert teaching the class either by their language, "*Kylie just shared a great idea. Can you explain it to everyone?"*(*Rachel, year 7 teacher*); by plugging in their laptop in the data projector and saying "*talk us through how you did that one"* (*Greg, year 8 teacher);* or by imagining a trajectory of expertise *"One day there will be a scientific law named after you Dylan" (Adam, year 9 teacher).* In each class students were expected to work with peers, either in highly structured ways in Rachel's class, in informally structured groups in Adam's class, or in fluid and unstructured ways in Greg's class. Students expressed a strong preference for learning from peers.

> *"It just helps to talk to them because sometimes they understand or you understand so you can discuss and see what you have learned." (Elanie, year 8)*
>
> *"Other students like know how we learn cos we are with them every day. So I guess we get feedback about how they do it and how we do it and how we can improve and stuff." (Elise, year 8)*

Important self and peer assessment occurred informally within the peer dialogue. This informal AfL helped students set themselves goals for quality by evaluating their own work against the qualities they saw in their peer's work. It was not a formal comparison, but a kind of social standard setting.

> *"When we work in groups, we all like have the same stuff and we all work together, and we see other people's work and so we are like 'we should do like this person's'" (Emma, year 9)*
>
> *"We all sort of rely on each other. We are all sort of friends and we all look around what other people are doing to see if we are doing our thing right." (Douglas, year 8)*

The interviews with students revealed the powerful influence of this social standard setting. The teachers had not been aware that the students paid such close attention to each other's work, but recognised that some students were regarded by others as more expert. While Emma indicated that she looked at the work of others, she was regarded by her peers as more expert, and would often be asked to help. As Fiona *(year 9)* explained, *"I know sometimes I*

get it wrong, so I have to go ask Emma or Lachlan or Michelle." In the community of practice model, the teacher was not the only master with apprentices as students took on the roles of expert within peer groups. Douglas knew that was part of the role he played in his year 8 class with other students expecting him to ask clarifying questions of the teacher. The students knew that Douglas had an identity in the class as a central participant, so his peers believed Douglas would not get into trouble for asking a clarifying question whereas if they had asked it, they believed the teacher would not be as understanding.

> *Usually people think of me as the person who is the smart one or one who knows what they're doing or stuff like that and I'm not trying to be up myself or anything like that but that's usually how they look at it. So if I don't know what I'm doing then they [worry]. I think they sort of look up to me, so if I'm organised, they think they have to be because they somehow think I'm better than them." (Douglas, year 8)*

A sense of social safety was also an important pre-requisite for effective working with peers. Where students were seated with students they did not know well, they were concerned about what others thought of them. Lachlan *(year 9)* explained, *"If you are not sitting next to friends, you are not as free to ask questions."* Fear of social disapproval was enough to limit some students' participation. The case study teachers helped minimise this fear by teaching and modelling social skills and devising ways to make peer participation socially safe.

Mutual engagement – doing things together

Belonging, trust and respect was not regarded as peripheral to the learning work within the classes, but an essential social foundation that the teacher needed to and continually maintain so that students would engage in the risky process of negotiating new learning identities. The teachers established positive relationships with students through humour, shared language and routines, movement throughout the class and a calm but enthusiastic expertise that gave students confidence in the teacher's leadership. Students stated *"It helps if everyone likes the teacher, cos if you don't like the teacher, you don't really want to learn or listen" (Lachlan, yr 9).* Engaging learning experiences gave students

opportunity to use cool tools and work with their peers. Open learning tasks such as designing their own experiments, creating photo-stories and open ended research investigations gave students permission to participate as legitimate creators of knowledge. This social construction of knowledge required a significant investment of teacher time and energy, and the willingness to reconceptualise traditional patterns of power and control in the classroom. Greg described himself as like a swan, appearing to "*glide effortlessly in front of the students, while working like mad to get it all happening*" (*Greg, year 8 teacher*). Tobin (2007, p. 7) describes this important part of the teacher's work well; "to create social networks among participants, initiate and sustain successful encounters, establish entrainment, and produce significant amounts of positive emotional energy". The case study teachers all acknowledged that establishing and maintaining positive relationships with students and a productive classroom work environment was emotionally and physically demanding work.

In the three case studies, the teachers made visible their process of negotiating the socially situated identity of an expert. Each teacher normalised mistake making and confusion as part of learning by modelling their own learning and problem-solving and by framing student mistake making and risk taking in learning as positive behaviours. The teacher's expectations that the students would also appropriate this identity of an expert challenged existing patterns of participation and gave students new or alternative roles. Students were positioned as responsible for their learning; *A boy called out from his laptop, "Sir I don't have a microphone." Greg looked up from where he was helping another student. "What could you do? Get one, buy one, use the library's. You work it out."* Greg deliberately positioned a boy with a learning difficulty as a sports expert, and a withdrawn moody girl who preferred her vampire novels to the class activity with a new identity as the

class journalist. As Johnston (2004, p. 24) explains, "these identities provide students with a sense of their responsibilities, and reasonable ways to act, particularly toward one another and toward the object of study". These invitations to participate in new ways were more easily accepted by students when they saw the value in the role as enacted by their teacher, or peers. The case study teachers recognised the benefit of the students learning from their peers which provided an additional important source of the sense of belonging and identification needed for mutual engagement.

Joint enterprise – the rhythm of the day to day work

While teachers planned the lessons, the day to day work or joint enterprise was a negotiation of meaning that Wenger (p. 53) describes as "a flavour of continuous interaction, of gradual achievement and of give and take." Ongoing dialogue within the class, the powerful learning between peers and the way the teacher shared the ownership of the tools and gave freedom of movement within the class invited students to develop identities as agentive participants. Giving students freedom to engage in "loops" of dialogue as a class rather than just the "ping-pong pattern" of teacher question and answer (Askew & Lodge, 2000) and work with peers and move about the classroom challenged the traditional power paradigms of the classroom. Adam and Greg both indicated that this was a source of tension for them. They felt that others in the school may have held negative views of their teaching ability as their classes may have appeared *"too chatty",* but as Adam explained *"to make it a classroom where the students are heard, you can't keep too tight a lid on* [the discussion] *" (Adam, yr 9 teacher).* Students also had to learn the expectations for working together as a class where dialogue was encouraged.

Rachel reported that it took her class several months to appropriate the new preferred collaborative ways of acting. To help students recognise her expectations, she would often give directions that included social expectations and constructed their identities as capable

participants who work together with the teacher. *"Make sure you have signed the work, thank your partner kindly and head back to your seat."* She then moved to the laptop and data projector and students were given a few minutes to finalise tasks and move before she raised her head to say, *"You should be back at your seats by now"* and *"Ok year 7s, there are 5 minutes to finish. Raise your hands if this is enough time."(Rachel, year 7 teacher)* Rogoff (2008, p. 57) notes that "learning to distinguish the appropriate ways to act in different situations is a very important accomplishment in all communities", and is a creative process supported by social partners who suggest connections. Tobin (2007, p. 5) describes this important skill of reading the appropriate social permissions of the community of practice "cultural fluency", the enacting of knowledge in ways that are " appropriate, anticipatory and timely." Those students who could read the social signals of the classroom, and needed little prompting in their cultural fluency were most often those who were identified by teachers as autonomous learners.

Cues for students about how to operate within the classroom culture were also provided by non-verbal tools. In Greg's year 8 classroom, his laptop background changed regularly. It would sometimes have a photo of his toddler son, at other times a photo of him fishing and he would wait for this to spark a conversation with students that he would link into the learning intentions. Elise and Rose (yr 8) described a conversation they had with their teacher and class about a photo of an Indigenous girl that Greg had taken while visiting Halls Creek in Western Australia;

> *Elise: "There is a really cute picture he's got on his laptop background of a little girl. Her hair's just so beautiful; it sticks up everywhere, so cute."*
> *Rose: "And he said 'that's natural' And she's got the whitest teeth. And he's like, 'they don't have toothpaste up there', and I'm like 'how can you have white teeth and no toothpaste'?"*

The class conversation went on to discussions about bush tucker, European settlement impacts on Indigenous communities and the debate in Halls Creek over banning alcohol sales. Students were evaluating their assumptions and adjusting their understanding of Indigenous history through the feedback they gained in classroom dialogue. However each teacher also maintained an identity of being the one in charge who would assert their positional authority to bring the class to order when students did not maintain the co-operative lesson flow.

Students were active participants in creating the rhythm of the daily work. Laughter was one way in which the students maintain respect and belonging by smoothing over shame, *"If someone like Teylah gets every single thing wrong in maths, she has a bit of a laugh, everyone else has a bit of a laugh and we go what were we laughing at again?"(Russell, year 8).* On occasions, on hot afternoons, the year 9 science students would continue to ask Adam questions that would draw on his expertise, and position themselves as passive listeners and observers. In those times the space of expertise was so fully occupied by the teacher that it didn't leave any space for the students to develop their expertise in participation. Adam would recognise this negotiation where students had left the work to him, and would return the focus to student participation. Students had developed skills by their experiences in other classrooms of leaving the work of being an expert to the teacher. For students to learn new patterns of participation, those of dialogue and interaction, where good students did more than just 'listen' took time. This involved a re-negotiation of their roles and identities as students.

Negotiating identity

A centrally participating learner identity involved knowing what was required as well as how to participate. Students also negotiated their identities drawing on their personal pasts

as well as broader cultural narratives of learning which often involved value conflicts. When the teachers were trying to help students take responsibility for being knowledge creators, many students had to negotiate a conflict between their cultural expectations of learning and the new expectations. In the following example, year 9 science students engaged in a routine of a self evaluative quiz at the start of each lesson. Students were encouraged to attempt the quiz from their memory first, but to look at their notebooks to answer their questions if they were unsure as this was a way of learning. Students were strategic in choosing whether to do this or not.

> *Steve: "It is good because it refreshes your memory from last week."*
> *Michelle: "plus it shows you, if you do it properly, it shows you where you are at. I try not to look at my word page, but if I really don't know what it's about then I look at my word page...Sometimes I don't look at my word list on purpose. I can get it wrong and"*
> *Lachlan: "learn from that."*
> *Michelle: "study that."*
> *Lachlan: "You learn from your mistakes. You don't from what you get right."*
> *Zeph: " that's what I do most of the time, then sometimes I'm really slack and I just turn back and look at it (laughs). That's not marked on your report card, so it's not really a bad kind of copying."*
> *Interviewer: "But Mr Turner is saying you can look at your word list."*
> *Jordan: "Yeah, but I don't look at my word list. I see that as cheating."*

This conversation with students reveals some of their varying cultural narratives about learning. For Michelle and Lachlan, self evaluation and mistake making were valued as a helpful part of learning. In using the quiz to set goals for themselves, they were in alignment with the teacher's expectations of an autonomous student. Zeph attributed value to learning if it was to be reported on his school report card. For Zeph and Jordan the quiz fitted within their cultural narrative of 'tests' rather than 'learning' carrying within it expectations about cheating and copying. Connecting learning with this test narrative created a value conflict for these students who resolved it by not engaging with the AfL practice desired by the teacher. Until this reflective conversation with the researcher, the teacher had not been aware that

these students were experiencing a value conflict as the students regularly completed the quiz without comment or demur.

Student gendered identities and histories also shaped how students understood expectations for participation. Close observation of the teacher's mood and his or her relationships with others helped them establish expectations for their own participation with the goal of maintaining a good relationship with the teacher and not "getting into trouble";

> *Interviewer: "So you travel from class to class. How do you work out what is ok with each teacher?"*
> *Emma: "probably trial and error and watching your classmates and learning from their mistakes."*
> *Interviewer: "How would you learn from their mistakes?"*
> *Emma "If they do something wrong that the teacher doesn't like, well you just.."*
> *Max: "know for the future..."*
> *Maria: "and make sure you don't do it."*

Emma and Maria brought with them gendered expectations of how 'good' girls participate in a classroom; quiet, co-operative, polite, well behaved and pleasant. The fulfilment of the teacher's expectation that an autonomous science learner would experiment, take risks and explore to learn involved working beyond these gendered expectations which also then involved a change to their identities as learners. Emma also had the identity within her peer group as an expert, and she described how she negotiated this identity within a gendered expectation of being a helpful girl;

> *Emma: "I have to help everyone all the time, in everything"(quiet laugh)*
> *Interviewer: "Does that bother you?"*
> *Emma:" Oh no. Everyone just asks me."*
> *Interviewer: "Do you ever say no?"*
> *Emma: "People say I have to say that, but I never say no....I don't like saying it."*

Emma felt she had to help, and found it difficult to say no when she was asked, even though it felt like she was always helping others. To respond differently was to take a risk to her sense of identity as a girl, as well as her social safety as she was accepted within her role as a helpful expert. The AfL contexts of peer feedback and collaboration and dialogue to help

develop a community of practice and share expertise involves negotiations of identity of gender for boys and girls, as well as negotiating identities as members of a culture, faith, a peer group, a family, a neighbourhood, and a 'smart kid' or a 'dumb kid' in different subject areas. Teachers who are using AfL practices to develop autonomy need to recognise the kinds of negotiations of identity that occur within that school context and help students negotiate with peers in ways that minimises the social risk.

Discussion

Implementing AfL practices to enhance learner autonomy was highly challenging for teachers. Establishing and maintaining positive relationships to encourage participation was emotionally and physically demanding work. Engaging students in open dialogue and as co-learners challenged traditional cultural narratives of learning. Students occasionally resisted new patterns of participation and teachers needed to persevere and also find socially safe ways of helping students negotiate new learning identities. The three case study teachers also found it challenging to initially articulate their expectations of an autonomous learner. Making explicit the often tacit expectations and routines of an expert in the subject domain required ongoing critical reflection by the teacher about what they expected from students. Developing and extending a shared repertoire with students also required a high degree of subject expertise from the teacher. A further challenge that emerged for the teachers was the focus on the patterns of participation.

Shifting the teacher's gaze to patterns of participation.

By examining AfL practices from a sociocultural perspective, the teacher's gaze was shifted towards the patterns of participation within the classroom context. The teacher's repertoire of ways to help students become more expert expanded once the identity of an autonomous learner was regarded as a social role within the classroom culture. In some ways

this made it easier for the case study teachers. For these teachers with existing skills in establishing positive relationships with students, and reputations as experts in their subject matter, they were able to give more significance to the positive teacher-student interactions that they valued. The theoretical perspective that understanding and cognition develops through social interaction with more experienced others as a form of guided participation or apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990) and includes both the tacit and the explicit interactions (Wenger, 1998) affirmed their personal pedagogy. Yet in other ways, shifting the teacher gaze to patterns of participation was also very challenging.

The teachers experienced tensions between a desire to see students learn by active participation and beliefs about learning that positioned students as individuals who were responsible for their choices. When Adam discussed those students who were participating on the periphery, he described some as "*wheelbarrow*" students who would only learn if "*you picked them up and carried them" (Adam, yr 9 teacher).* He wondered if taking more time in class to help them was a waste of his time and not fair to others who wanted to learn. His desire was for students to be self motivated, so he resisted the role of the teacher doing the learning work for the student, but his view put the responsibility on the student to make changes. This view that places the responsibility or blame on the individual is part of a very pervasive traditional cultural narrative of learning, where peripheral participants are thought to be either not trying or not be capable of the learning (Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, & Gardner, 1991). In Lave and Wenger's (1991) model, peripheral participation is a legitimate form of learning, where the newcomer is able to participate and watch and learn from peers and more experienced others and become more central participants over time as they are included in an identity of belonging to the community of practice. Gee (2004, p. 60) also distinguishes between traditional cultural vertical beliefs about assessing knowledge where learning is

viewed as "incremental progress on a scale from low skills to high skills as if moving up a ladder" and horizontal learning experiences which "look like mucking around, getting your feet wet, getting use to the water, and getting ready, eventually, to jump in and go swimming." Horizontal learning reframes failure and peripheral participation as an important precursor for later learning especially for 'at risk' students. This horizontal view of learning is a new and different cultural narrative of learning, and a difficult one for teachers to recognise and reconcile within their practice as a vertical conception of learning is embedded deeply within beliefs about learning in schooling culture.

Conclusion

An autonomous learner was how the teachers described a centrally participating student. The teachers anticipated that AfL practices would make visible to students expectations about learning quality and progress and so act as bridges to help students move from peripheral participation to more expert central participation. For some students AfL practices were bridges to participation while for others it was a positive relationship with the teacher or a more confident peer that provided the sense of belonging which in turn enabled participation which then led to a sense of becoming more expert. For both the teacher and students AfL practices involved a continuing negotiation of identity and patterns of participation. A sociocultural perspective of AfL provided teachers with some further insights into the complexities of establishing AfL pedagogical practices in middle school classrooms.

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